



THE COUNCIL needs to stop seeing us as objects and start seeing us as people." So says Mary Ann McCarthy, a Traveller who is facing eviction from Dale Farm in Essex. Some 96 families live at Dale Farm, which is part of an Irish Traveller site. People have lived there since the 1970s. Travellers own the land, but Basildon council has refused to grant them planning permission to live there. It claims the land is greenbelt (see box) and has issued them with eviction notices—even though they have nowhere else to go. "It's not like it used to be," said Mary Ann, who has lived at Dale Farm for around ten years. "New laws have made it harder for us to travel now. That's why we bought this land. But it seems we can't do right for doing wrong."

Dale Farm lies among fields and winding country lanes in Basildon. The local media paints it as a dirty hovel. It isn't. There are immaculate homes with gardens full of flowers. There are always people out washing the windows and sweeping the roads. Children ride their bikes and play among the caravans. There is a sense of pride in the place they have made home. But the threatened eviction has made life a living nightmare.

"I'm trying to block it out of my mind," said Mary Ann. "Words can't explain how I feel." Many on the site are vulnerable and would be put at risk if forced out on to the road. Several newborn babies and pregnant women live on the site. And some residents have serious medical conditions—including diabetes, heart problems, lung damage and cancer.

As Socialist Worker reported last week, the eviction would put some people's lives in danger (see <http://bit.ly/GDLSr>).

But Basildon council wants to tear up their homes and leave them with nothing.

Devastated Margaret Gammell has diabetes, heart problems and high blood pressure. She is frightened about what will happen to her health if she has no permanent address and no doctor. "Why is the council putting us through all this distress?" she asked. "They've no heart. They don't care."

Margaret says the eviction is about "prejudice". "I could end up left on the street with just a few bags of clothes," she said. But she added, "We'll fight to the bitter end." Mary Kollerton lives nearby with her grandson Dan, who has Down's Syndrome. She said, "We're devastated about the eviction. It's terrible. People

here are in homes that they own, living on land that they bought. "A lot of people don't sleep, and they cry all day. "Dan was coming on great at the school and really enjoying it. But it will be a real problem for my daughter to get him into another school if we're on the road." Lots of residents worry about how the eviction will disrupt children's lives. Grandmother Nora Sheridan said, "I never got to school and I can't read or write. My children can't either. But now their children can read and write. They love school!"

The eviction is nonsensical. The council is willing to spend £18 million make around 400 people homeless. It seems little thought has been given to what will happen after an eviction. "It won't solve anything," said Mary Ann. "Travellers will have to move onto the nearest field and then they'll be moved on again."

Bingo The threat to Dale Farm is part of a wider assault on Travellers that is taking place across Europe. Grattan Puxon, a campaigner for Travellers' rights, said, "This is similar to how governments are treating Travellers in Italy and France. "It's ethnic cleansing—and the government is paying for it."

Travellers at Dale Farm have friends in the settled community—they go to mass together and meet at bingo. "There are a lot of good people out there who do like Gypsies and Travellers," said Mary Ann. "But others read the papers and make judgements. Some people can never see the good side of us. They can say horrible things—even when they don't know us."

Prejudice is one of the reasons why Travellers want to stay together on the site. Mary Ann said, "When I was travelling and there was a crime committed, the police would come straight to the Travellers. They'd assume it must have been one of us."

"But I've been here ten years and we've caused no problems—the police have never arrested anyone here."

Time after time, Travellers say the money they are spending on the eviction should be spent on things people need. "I've seen children starving in Africa on the TV," said Mary Kollerton. "It's easy to think of something else to do with that money."

Mary Ann added, "When I speak to people at bingo, you see they've got hard lives. Things they need are being cut and they can't find jobs. That money could be put to much better use."

Basildon council has failed to provide most of the families at Dale Farm somewhere else to live. Mary Flynn said she was offered a second floor flat. She has the lung disease COPD and cannot manage stairs. "It was the worst experience of my life," she said. "Now, I need to have my family around me, not live in a house on my own. I've never lived in a house, I've lived in caravans all my life. "It's nice to have people around to help you. They give me lifts to the health centre. If one's gone out,



See more of Elisabeth's photography at <http://elisabethblanchet.photoshelter.com/>

THE FIGHT FOR THE FARM

Travellers have made Dale Farm in Essex their home since the 1970s. Now the council plans to evict them from land they own and throw their lives into chaos. Sadie Robinson spoke to some of those preparing to defend their homes. Photos by Elisabeth Blanchet and Socialist Worker



had to get out," she said. "It felt claustrophobic. I want to stay here, where all my friends are around me."

Mary Ann says that she feels safe at Dale Farm. "My grandchildren can be out playing and I don't have to worry about them," she said. "We're used to always being with Travellers."

The council plans to use the notorious bailiff Constant & Co—and has approved £10 million for the policing operation.



DISCRIMINATION

Victims of a vicious racism

ROMANY GYPSIES and Irish Travellers are legally recognised as ethnic groups and covered under the Race Relations Act. They face serious discrimination that has an impact on their health, education and living standards. ● Life expectancy for Travellers is ten years lower than the national average. ● Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely to have experienced the death of a child than non-Travellers. ● In 2003 less than one quarter of Irish Traveller and Gypsy children got five GOSes at grades A-C—compared to a national average of just over half. ● A third of Travellers in Britain don't have a legal or secure place to live—many live by the roadside or on unauthorised developments in constant fear of eviction. ● Travellers are one of the most unfairly reported minorities in the media (Stonewall, 2003). Successive governments have made the situation worse. ● The 1994 Criminal and Justice and Public Order Act scrapped the obligation on local authorities to find sites for Travellers. Travellers were encouraged to buy their own land instead. ● Councils refuse more than 90 percent of planning applications

from Travellers (Barkham, 2005). This compares to 20 percent of non-Traveller applications. ● Most local authorities are failing to meet their targets to significantly increase accommodation for Travellers by 2011, according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009). ● The Tories are making life worse for Travellers. The Localism Bill removes the requirement on local councils to provide alternative sites for Travellers. It puts the responsibility for determining the "appropriate" level of site provision for Travellers onto individual councils. This will make provision a lottery and life for Travellers even more uncertain.

'Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely to have experienced the death of a child than non-Travellers'



An eviction could leave children on the roadside without access to school

BASILDON COUNCIL

Land for sale—but not to Travellers

BASILDON COUNCIL says it has to evict around 400 people from Dale Farm because the land is greenbelt. This is disputed. "This was never a beauty spot," says Mary Ann McCarthy. In fact it was a concrete scrap yard when Travellers bought the land.

Around half of the pitches have planning permission—which means there will still be Travellers at the site even if some are evicted.

And Basildon Council's green credentials aren't up to much. While it feigns concern about protecting greenbelt land, it is approving contracts to firms to build new houses on greenbelt.

It recently granted permission to Banner Homes to build 51 houses on the former Billericay School Farm, a greenbelt site.

In June, it also announced plans for homes and a business park to be built on 86 acres of a wildlife haven and South Essex College site. Tory council leader Tony Ball said that "some development of the site is inevitable".

It can only take power when the ruling class turns to it. This is what happened in Italy in the 1920s and Germany in the 1930s.

PARADED

Today in Britain, many marches by the racist English Defence League (EDL) have been banned. But this has not stopped it from holding "static protests".

Bans just mean that the police "escort" the thugs to their rallying point. So they get paraded through the streets while chanting racist abuse.

And bans are a dangerous idea because they encourage passivity. They take people off the streets. It means people waiting at home in fear.

If we don't mobilise, it could leave the EDL marching unopposed. Whenever that has happened the EDL has rioted and attacked Muslims.

When the state gives itself extra repressive powers it will use them against the left.

The government brought in the Public Order Act in 1937 supposedly to counteract the rise of Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts. It didn't stop fascism—and was used against left wing and workers' protests for decades afterwards.

It was the mass, grassroots resistance that confronted the Blackshirts in the streets, such as at Cable Street in 1936, that stopped fascism in Britain.

The police exist to uphold the status quo in society. Because of its role, the police force is institutionally racist and hostile to movements that

What do socialists say?

Why a state ban won't weaken racist groups

MANY PEOPLE, including some in anti-fascist groups, have responded to Anders Behring Breivik's murderous rampage by calling for fascist organisations to be banned. Still more want the authorities to ban their marches.

In many ways this is an understandable reaction to the attacks on the left and black people carried out by the far right.

But banning racist organisations will not end racism and hampers the fight against fascism. In Germany neo-Nazi groups are banned, but that has not stopped fascists organising and carrying out racist attacks.

Socialists should never look to the state to deal with fascists. This is because of the nature of capitalism. The ruling class prefers their system to run with a "democratic" veneer—a parliament, a nominally free press and so on.

At times of crisis, when there is a strong working class movement challenging their rule, they will look to other methods.

This is where fascist groups come in. Fascism is a mass movement of the middle class committed to destroying all forms of democracy. It aims to show its usefulness to the ruling class by forming street gangs to terrorise the left.

It can only take power when the ruling class turns to it. This is what happened in Italy in the 1920s and Germany in the 1930s.

These actions have brought people together, but they have not weakened the EDL yet. This task is now more urgent than ever.

Incidentally, the EDL has been buoyed by Breivik's attack. Its leader, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, appeared on mainstream TV saying that a similar attack will happen in Britain.

He has been allowed to label multiculturalism and Islam as the problem—not the actions of Nazis and the EDL's friend Breivik.

Muslims are under constant attack from racists, right wing journalists and politicians who want to scapegoat them for the problems in society.

That is why we have to oppose racism wherever it appears. But we also have to tackle its root cause—the capitalist system.

Racism doesn't get rid of the conditions that breed racist ideas. As the economic crisis deepens, the ruling class will continue to try and force the poor to pay—by cutting jobs, services and benefits. And they will use racism to try to divide us so that we do not unite against them.

That is why the solution to racism can only come from people at the bottom of society challenging it. The unity forged in the battle against racism and cuts can play a crucial role in taking forward the struggle for a world without bigotry and exploitation.



EDL supporters don't fear bans

challenge our rulers. When anti-racists take to the streets the police often respond with repression.

On anti-EDL protests, such as one in Bolton last year, the police arrested, beat and harassed demonstrators. Yet EDL thugs are left free to attack innocent residents and mosques.

We cannot trust the police to stop the EDL or any fascist organisation. Only a mass movement, rooted in working class communities, has the strength to challenge the EDL ideologically and politically and to drive it off the streets.

The vast majority of ordinary people hate the violence and racism of the EDL, and are horrified by Breivik's terrorist acts.

Over the last few years, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) has organised to protest against the EDL wherever it rears its ugly head, publicly opposing it on the streets.

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New Bookmarks publication:
Defending Multiculturalism: A Guide for the Movement
Edited by Hassan Mahammedi
£8

A vibrant, informative collection of essays that sets out to defend Britain's multicultural way of life.

